

Title: Paradoxes in Tolstoy's Moral Thought
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This paper revisits one of the most discussed topics in all of Russian literature, the vision of moral perfection in Tolstoy's fiction, to tease out paradoxes not yet adequately addressed. First, Tolstoy thinks differently in his fiction and tracts, in the former arguing from happiness and praising those who live unself-consciously, in the latter arguing from duty and demanding of us self-consciousness. Second, highest virtue is repeatedly shown to be a form of absence (say, nonresistance, where the right thing to do is nothing), and, with the signal exception of selflessness, natural in us, innate at birth; this alters its dynamic, problematizing conscious efforts to be good. Third, there is an inherent "interiorness" to Tolstoyan virtue, meaning the spirit in the doer's heart outweighs its real-life consequences. Fourth, while being good involves many qualities, two central categories are interiority (Tolstoy's understanding of authenticity as inward, his rejection of groups, his placement of conscience and God within us) and Christian selflessness; yet there is a direct contradiction between the two. Fifth, Tolstoy allows an ethical double standard in which the identical act is graded in different ways for innocents and non-innocents. Sixth, Richard Gustafson's "resident and stranger" reading opposes Tolstoy's project of Christian virtue to personal frailties of non-love on Tolstoy's part which derail it; I propose the divide actually falls between two competing visions of Christian ethics, the saint who ministers to the world's suffering and the saint who flees its corruption. Late Tolstoy tries to solve this paradox by crafting a vision of ethical love in which we relate to the other in a spirit not of brotherhood, but of respectful indifference, selfless in a deep sense, where we have renounced our own selves *and* others'.

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